

SCHOOLS FORUM

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2015 AT SALISBURY ROOM - COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE.

Present:

Mr N Baker (Chairman), Mr M Watson (Vice-Chair), Mrs A Bates, Mr A Bridewell, Ms M Chilcott, Mrs R. Collard, Miss Tracy Cornelius, Ms J Hatherell, Mr J Hawkins, Mrs S Jiggins, Mr J Proctor, Mrs D Rock, Mr N. Roper, Ms I Sidmouth, Mr D Whewell and Mrs C Williamson

Also Present:

Cllr Richard Gamble

1 Apologies and Changes of Membership

Apologies were received from:

Amanda Burnside – Wiltshire College
Mandy Christopher - Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education

Amanda Burnside was substituted by Cathy Shahrokni

2 Minutes of the previous Meeting

An amendment to minute 52 of the 6 November 2014 minutes was proposed. The amendment was agreed and for the minute to read:

“Questions were asked on the local authority process through which schools in deficit can be challenged. The Governing Body must submit a deficit request to the Chief Financial Officer of the LA. A deficit budget will only be approved where the school can demonstrate it has in place an approved Financial Recovery Plan.”

Resolved

To agree and sign the minutes as a true and correct record of the meetings held on 6 November 2014, subject to the amendments detailed above.

3 Declaration of Interests

Mrs Aileen Bates declared a pecuniary interest in item 8, Split Site Allowance - High Needs Provision. For this item Mrs Bates did not vote.

4 Chairman's Announcements

It was announced that item 11 (Schools Budget 2015/16) would be taken before item 8 (Split Sites Allowance –High Needs Provision).

5 Trust Board Update

A new document had been received for any providers working with children up to the age of eight. The document included information on “disqualification by association”. This meant that those living in the same household as someone who was barred from working with children were required to seek an exemption from OFSTED. The OFSTED handbook had been amended to include this provision.

The number of telephone numbers available for ringing Early Help with concerns was being reduced in order to provide a single point of entry.

The School Improvement Strategy had been published, and set out the changes in school effectiveness nationally and locally.

Resolved

To note the Trust Board update.

6 Budget Monitoring 2014-15

Liz Williams, Head of Finance, presented the budget monitoring information against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for the financial year 2014-15 as at 30th November 2014.

The overall position up to the end of November had not significantly changed. Overspend was stated to have increased by £0.3million, and now totalled £2.3million.

An error in the report was noted. In paragraph 3 the figure of £2.1million should read £2.9million.

There had been an improvement in High Needs. The Early Years underspend had reduced. Key areas of overspend remained in Named Pupil Allowances, top ups for pupils in non-Wiltshire schools and top ups for Post-16 placements.

Expenditure on the free entitlement for 3 & 4 year olds was currently projected to underspend by £0.096million.

Various items had been agreed to be funded from the DSG Reserve in 2014-15. Based upon the current overspend against the DSG, and the likely call upon the Reserve, the balance was projected to be £300,000 at the end of the financial year.

The hourly rate for 2 year olds was moving to participation funding from next year, and would be based on census figures. If the current hourly rate was to be supported in 2015-16, then this would need to be a call on reserves.

Most of the pressures came from within the High Needs Block. It was stated that the Education Funding Authority (EFA) was to be contacted to inform them that not enough funding was being provided.

An increase in the numbers aged from 18-25 who were looking for funded further education was noted.

Susan Tanner advised that the right service changes were in place, and the effects would be felt from next financial year onwards.

Feedback from the EFA on their allocations of places following the Exceptional Cases process was expected on the 23 January 2015. The EFA had been invited to attend Schools Forum but had declined the invitation, due to the official feedback being issued later in the month.

It was requested that the current budget be revisited to see if further savings could be identified in the current year, as most of the overspends were being met through the reserves. This was asked to be brought back to the March 2015 meeting. It was stated that Wiltshire Council should be providing press releases on this issue to generate publicity.

Resolved

- 1. To agree in principle that the DSG spending plan be set within the three allocated DSG blocks of money, taking into account the previous decisions of Schools Forum. Any savings within a block should then be recycled to the same block, subject to future decisions of Schools Forum.**
- 2. To note the budget monitoring position at the end of November 2014.**

7 Reports from Working Groups

Schools Funding Working Group:

The minutes of the 6 January 2015 Schools Funding Working Group were presented.

Wiltshire Council had submitted a request for 200 additional High Needs places to be funded for the 2015-16 year, using the 'Exceptional cases' request. A total of 102 places were granted for Wiltshire College, 14 for Greentrees School, and 1 at Kings Park School (now known as River Mead Academy).

Specific results were due for 23 January 2015. The decision would be appealed, with the deadline for this mid-February. The appeal would be submitted for the unfunded places..

Resolved

To note the minutes of the working group meeting.

Early Years Reference Group:

The minutes of the 21 November 2014 Early Years Reference Group meeting were presented.

Resolved

To note the minutes of the reference group meeting.

8 Split Site Allowance - High Needs Provision

Grant Davis, Strategic Financial Support Manager, was in attendance to introduce the report.

The item had been brought back from the 6 November 2014 meeting after it was agreed that a detailed schedule of costs should be provided for the two schools.

The proposal that St Nicholas' School should only receive £45,000 funding was disputed. It was stated that savings would be made in the reduction in people going out of county, and that £100,000 had been originally considered, based upon the split-site allowance for maintained secondary schools. The Chair of Governors discussed the options available to the school.

It was requested that this be taken back to the working group to be looked at again.

It was noted that the regulations did not allow for a split-site allowance for Special Schools and any allowance would be paid through a school specific top-up rate.

The £45,000 was considered to offset the associated costs of running an extra building. With regard to other costs associated with the SEN provision, Susan Tanner would be looking at this issue, and would bring this back to a future meeting of Schools Forum in the form of a review. It was noted that the £45,000 could be refused, and the whole issue could be reviewed.

Resolved

To defer until the 12 March 2015 Schools Forum meeting when more information would be provided by the High Needs team.

9 Schools Financial Management Information Statement

Jane Ralph, School Support Accountant, was in attendance to introduce the report.

Revenue surplus and deficit balances were considered at the November 2014 Schools Forum meeting. Following from this there had been a reclassification of balances. The Department for Education (DfE) were challenging authorities with 5% of schools that have had a surplus of 15% or more for the last 5 years. The 15% threshold was noted as applying to the total revenue balance.

The Schools Funding Working Group met in the week prior to the meeting to consider a draft version of the report.

Support would be offered to schools with a deficit in moving forward. Schools would be provided plenty of information. At the working group it was discussed what could be done with the information, and it was proposed that the report be presented to Governors; a copy be sent to School Improvement Advisors; that it be distributed to the Head & Chair of Governors; that additional wording and descriptions would be included; a declaration would be completed by Head & Governors, and where a school exceeds the 8% or 15% threshold, otherwise no declaration would be required.

It was stated that 8% and 5% should be included along with 15%.

Resolved

- 1. To include a further analysis of schools with revenue balances exceeding 5% and 8% for secondary and primary/special schools respectively for the last 5 years.**
- 2. To provide an end of year statement for the Chair of Governors.**
- 3. To support the budget monitoring through data comparing the year end forecast position, as defined on the budget and biannual Income and Expenditure returns, to the actual year end position.**
- 4. To include those schools with deficits.**
- 5. To provide a declaration to be completed by the Head and Governors where a school exceeds the 8% or 15% threshold.**

10 Sickness Supply Insurance Pool 2015-16

Grant Davis introduced the report to raise School Forum's awareness of the current position of the Supply Pool Insurance Scheme.

The Supply Pool Insurance scheme had been running for a number of years providing schools with insurance cover for sickness absence. A cashback arrangement was in place whereby if a schools total year's claims were less than 50% of their premium, they would be entitled to a cashback payment.

The forecast balance on the Supply Pool at the end of 2014/15 was £1.174million. It was noted that the projected balance would be £1.051million if enhanced cashback was paid of £0.245million.

Currently it was being decided whether the cashback should be standard or enhanced.

It was asked why £40,000 was being paid to insurance companies when £1million was being rolled over and it had been previously agreed to stop paying this. An action was placed to stop this happening in the future.

Resolved

- 1. To continue to offer 2015-16 Premiums at a 0% increase on 2014-15's prices.**
- 2. To continue cashback payments.**
- 3. To start investigating extending the scheme to cover maternity.**

4. To provide cashback at the enhanced level.
5. To cease the Insurance Cover at the next point of renewal.

11 Schools Budget 2015-16

Elizabeth Williams, Head of Finance, was in attendance to introduce the report which outlined the detail of the schools funding settlement for 2015-16 and considered the implications for the Wiltshire schools budget.

The pupil premium would be continued in 2015-16. This would be paid to schools at the same rates as last year, apart from the Primary pupil rate had increased from £1,300 to £1320 per pupil. Based on January 2015 census data it was estimated that the total pupil premium grant allocated to Wiltshire schools would exceed £13 million in 2015-16.

The dedicated schools grant (DSG) had received an increase in total funding of £6.39million to £310.309million. The Schools Block had received a significant increase, whilst the Early Years Block had seen a slight decrease. The High Needs Block would be confirmed in March 2015. It was noted that no school would see a decrease in its 'per pupil' funding of more than 1.5%, in accordance with the requirements of the Minimum Funding Guarantee.

The growth in funding in the Schools Block was attributed to two factors, firstly the additional £5.7m from the Fairer Schools Funding allocation and £2.1m due to an increase of 505 pupils in the county.

The following assumptions for the schools delegated budget were proposed;

- Per pupil rates reflect the increases from the Fairer Schools Funding, as previously agreed with Schools Forum
- Lump sum allocations were unchanged at £85,000 for primary schools and £175,000 for secondary schools
- Total funding allocations for English as an Additional Language (EAL), Prior Attainment and Deprivation remain unchanged and funding rates were scaled accordingly
- Costs of the MFG were met through limiting the increases to schools gaining from the formulaic changes

The Early Years Block would be updated once 2014 census details were made available. Take-up was stated as being hard to predict and a ringfence of the budget was proposed. From April 2015 the funding of 2 year-old places would move to a full participation model where local authorities would be funded on the actual take up of places. It was discussed and agreed that any increase in DSG arising from the January early years census was allocated to the EYSFF budget to support increases in population and take up of places.

The hourly rate for 2 year olds was currently set at £5.43 to providers. This was stated as being the historical rate. The EFA funded rate for 2015-16 of £4.97 was questioned as to whether it was appropriate and £5.25 was considered as a midpoint.

The hourly rate was proposed to be reduced as there was risk that there would not be enough money in the reserves to continue the hourly rates as they were. The quantum provided enough for £4.97; anything higher would require using the reserves.

A consultation had taken place on a single hourly rate for 3&4 year olds. This was discussed at the meeting and further proposals would be brought to the next meeting.

The allocation of the high needs block was based on agreed planned place numbers and historical spend rather than on specific school census data. The final High Needs Block allocations will be notified in March 2015.

A request to the EFA for additional place funding through the Exceptional Case Process was successful in securing an additional 117 places within Wiltshire for 2015-16.

Given the current significant overspend within the high needs block in 2014-15, further modelling and work was being carried out, looking at all areas of the service. There was an underlying assumption that changes and services must be managed within the existing budget level.

Resolved

- 1. Any increase in DSG arising from the January early years census is allocated to the EYSFF budget to support increases in population and take up of places**
- 2. To agree in principle to £4.97 as an hourly rate for 2 year olds with the view that it is affordable and that any surplus is brought back to the 12 March 2015 Schools Forum meeting to be recycled.**
- 3. To agree that the hourly rate for 3&4 year olds be considered at the next meeting following further modelling work.**
- 4. Schools Forum agree the assumptions to be used in calculating the delegated budget**
- 5. Top-up rates remain unchanged, subject to any proposals at the March Schools Forum in relation to the High Needs Block**
- 6. That the overall schools budget is set at £310.309 million, the level of the provisional funding settlement and that work is taken to review the High Needs budget and contain spending within the allocated High Needs Block.**

12 Growth Fund

Grant Davis introduced the report on the allocation of funding for pupil growth 2015-16.

There were no proposed changes to the allocation of funding for the 2015/16 year. The total paid out was noted as being slightly over budget.

There were no changes to the criteria proposed. The report had been taken to the Schools Forum Working Group with the recommendation that the budget be set to a maximum of £1million.

Resolved

- 1. To approve the criteria for allocating the pupil Growth Fund in 2015-16.**

2. To agree that the budget for the Growth Fund be set at a maximum of £1million, subject to the affordability within the funding formula for 2015-16.

13 **Confirmation of dates for future meetings**

Decision

The future Schools Forum dates were confirmed, with the next meeting to be on 12 March 2015, 1.30 pm in Kennet Room at County Hall, Trowbridge.

14 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 1.30 - 4.30 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Adam Brown, of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718038, e-mail adam.brown@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line (01225) 713114/713115